

Q2
671
P574
BIRD



السناء

the PHOENIX

Number 8 December 1991



Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator)

for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

REVIEW OF 1991

The computerisation of the ABBA records continues apace but has unfortunately suffered a number of setbacks during the year, with problems concerning both data capture and software. It was planned that all manual records would be captured to the database by 31 December 1991, but this will not now be achieved. During the first two years of NCWCD sponsorship the plan was to prepare an *Interim Atlas* which would be based on all observer reports received since 1984. Obviously this cannot be done until all observer records are on the computer. The format of the *Interim Atlas* will be a map showing all records received for each species and a very short species account, probably of only one or two sentences. The *Interim Atlas* would not include records extracted from the literature, museum specimens or anything prior to 1954 as these areas of the database are still very incomplete and the result would be a biased picture for some species. The purpose of the *Interim Atlas* will be to provide those interested in Arabian birds with working distribution maps for the whole of Arabia and at the same time encourage field workers to fill in the gaps of the draft maps, check what has been published or point out apparent discrepancies. It is now expected that all observer reports received during the period 1984 to 1991 will be on the database by early 1992 and at that time maps can be prepared to go with the manuscript of the *Interim Atlas* which is already more or less complete. Hopefully the *Interim Atlas* will be available by about mid-1992. I will publish details when available. During the extended transition period whilst records are being captured to the computer, new records received have not been added to the manually maintained draft maps. Therefore a situation has developed whereby the best maps available at present do not reflect all information currently on file and are little better than those available last year. This unsatisfactory situation will only continue until the completion of the data capture early next year.

The outstanding news item from Arabia in the last year has of course been the Gulf conflict, which developed in early 1991 to a major armed conflict. Then followed an

unbelievable ecological disaster, with deliberate marine oil spillages, tremendous smoke pollution from many hundreds of oil fires and lakes of oil and tar in the interior of Kuwait. The effect on resident land birds has been bad enough but an expanding file of evidence suggests that there has been a catastrophic effect on many migrant species, especially shore birds and on the breeding seabirds of the northern Gulf. The effect of this massive pollution has been felt throughout the Gulf region and further afield. A full state, by state round-up of the impact of this pollution is given in OSME Bulletin No. 27 (Autumn 1991). Ironically in the aftermath of the



Fig 1. Night herons bred near Riyadh in summer 1991. First Arabian breeding record.

war a considerable number of studies by various international teams has been made on the coast and islands of the northern Gulf, producing a body of knowledge on birds and other flora and fauna of the area which probably surpasses all previous knowledge. In this issue there is an abstract of the seabird report of Peter Symens of NCWCD Riyadh showing that many more

Publisher

National Commission for Wildlife
Conservation and Development (NCWCD)
P.O.Box 61681
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



الناشر

المينة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية وإنمائها
ص. ب. ٦١٦٨١
الرياض - المملكة العربية السعودية

terns breed on some Saudi Arabian islands in the Gulf than was previously thought. His Gulf studies also discovered a new breeding species for Arabia which is dealt with in a separate article below. The effect of the Gulf oil fires in creating a more temperate regional climate, and thereby encouraging northern species to breed, is a possibility considered by Dr. James in his article on several new breeding birds at Riyadh. In a different vein Major Tony Crease gives a personal account of his birding activities during the conflict. Further war anecdotes will be gratefully received for *Phoenix* 9.

Chris Tucker who joined ABBA as a researcher in 1990 unfortunately could not continue with the project beyond mid 1991 and the post of researcher is again vacant. Data capture is now being organised by Julie Newman and typing done by Lorraine Russell, both of whom have provided an exceptional service through the year for which I am especially grateful.

Finally, apologies to a number of readers who may have had to pay postage on *Phoenix* 7 issued earlier this year! In the rush to get the issue out (it was seriously delayed through production problems) insufficient stamps were put on a number of envelopes in error.

Michael Jennings.

NEW BREEDING SPECIES

This column provides details and discussion of confirmed breeding species that are additional to the 1987 *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (Form 2) provided to all contributors. The number shown against each bird is the species code reference to be used in reporting observations on Form 3; the scientific names generally follow the *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species* by K.H. Voous (BOU, 1977). A revised Form 2 is in preparation. In the 12 months since the issue of *Phoenix* 7 an unbelievable eight new breeding birds have been discovered for Arabia. Separate papers follow on the breeding of Sandwich tern, squacco heron and night heron. Other new breeding birds are listed below.

Short-toed lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* (No 968)

On 16 June 1990 two juvenile birds were seen with an adult in alf-alfa fields at Thumahmah (MB27) north of Riyadh. One was seen to crouch and beg for food from an adult. (F E Rietkerk). The short-toed lark has been observed paired and singing on several occasions from central and northern Arabia. Also in the UAE males have been observed singing and holding territory and pairs have given anxiety calls. The species regularly breeds just to the north of our area in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.

European starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (No 1582)

On 28 June 1991 at Hamraniyah (VB28) northern UAE a small party of two adults and three or four juvenile starlings were feeding in a large field of alf-alfa. There were a number of Ghaf trees nearby which the starlings retreated to (C Richardson). This is an exceptional date

for starlings in the Gulf area where they usually occur as regular, sometimes abundant, winter visitors. The nearest point of the normal breeding range of the starling is probably only 300 km away in the mountains of western Iran. However a race of this starling occurring in the Sind of West Pakistan seems a more likely candidate for UAE breeding as it favours irrigated desert areas. This breeding occurrence in the UAE is another example of new habitats being exploited for nesting opportunities by species usually breeding in more northerly, temperate areas.

Pied mynah *Sturnus contra* (No 2039)

This exotic species has now been recorded from a number of squares in the UAE from Abu Dhabi to Ras al Khaimah, including song in March (VA26), juveniles in July (VB28) and food carrying adults in May (VA27), (C Richardson). Pied mynahs were also seen at Jeddah in February 1991 including an observation of one entering a lamp post head - a favoured breeding place for mynahs, (P Andrew). The pied mynah is an oriental species inhabiting the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent.

Spanish sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (No 1592)

An irregular winter visitor to northern and eastern Arabia, the Spanish sparrow has attempted to nest before in Arabia at Kuwait, *Phoenix* 3:5. In 1991 this sparrow bred at three sites in Saudi Arabia. At Jubail (PB31) there was a colony of at least 19 nests with 60 adults in the vicinity on 26 May, (P Symens); at Ras Tanageeb (OB32) juveniles were being fed by adults on 26 May, (S B El Din), and near al Hair (NA25) in May (D James). They were also recorded in April and June in the northern UAE (VB28) (C Richardson).

Avadavat *Amandava amandava* (No 2029)

This exotic has been recorded at several places around Arabia and has been known from the Riyadh area for at least 15 years. Nests were found in a reed bed near al Hair (MB25) in 1990 and 1991 (D James).

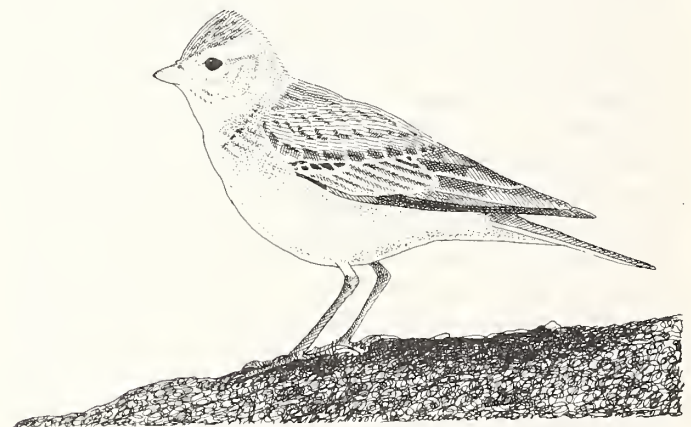


Fig 2. The short-toed lark has long been a candidate as a breeding species in Arabia. It bred near Riyadh in June 1990.

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF SANDWICH TERN IN ARABIA

While surveying the Saudi Arabian coastline of the Arabian Gulf for birds killed by the oil spills that had occurred earlier in the year, a small colony of Sandwich terns *Sterna sandvicensis* (ABBA No 611) was found at Tanageeb Bay (DB32) on 28 July 1991.

The colony was located on a very small island, some 100 m offshore, that was partly covered by halophytic vegetation, surrounded by a wide open sandy area. Approximately 60 pairs of white-cheeked terns *S. repressa* were breeding on the island and the breeding Sandwich terns were associated with this colony.

During the first visit on 28 July, at least five Sandwich tern chicks were being fed by adults and at least 20 adult birds were observed on and around the island. Chicks were between two and four weeks old. On a second visit to the site on 16 August, six chicks were observed, three were already flying and another three were close to fledging.

The Sandwich tern is a scarce winter visitor to the Arabian Gulf coast in Saudi Arabia from November to February, but isolated birds have been recorded in April, June and July. Previously, these summer visitors were believed to be immature birds (Bundy et al, 1989, *Birds of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia*). Larger numbers are believed to winter well offshore in the Arabian Gulf. Further south, in the UAE, the species is common throughout the year and many spend their first summer in that region, often collecting into groups at inshore sites from May to early September, although breeding has never been indicated (Richardson, 1990, *The Birds of the United Arab Emirates*). The closest known breeding grounds are along the southern and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea and along the northern coastline of the Black Sea. Wintering birds in the Gulf are believed to come from the Caspian Sea (Harrison, 1985, *An Atlas of the Birds of the Western Palearctic*).

The author thanks the people of INORENG, Spain, and in particular, Raoul Martinez Fernandez, biologist of the Fundacion, Jose Maria Blanc, Madrid, for sharing these observations and their company.

Peter Symens, NCWCD, PO Box 61681, 11575 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF SQUACCO AND NIGHT HERONS IN ARABIA AND OTHER INTERESTING BREEDING RECORDS FOR NEAR RIYADH SAUDI ARABIA

After the bulk of northern migrants had passed through in spring there seemed little excitement left until the return autumn migration. How wrong we were. On 25 April 1991 two pairs of ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca* were seen on the pool below the al Hair dam (MB25), one pair with five chicks. A first breeding record for central Arabia.

A whiskered tern *Chlidonias hybridus* in partial summer plumage present from 4 April on one of the pools on the Wadi Hanifah 'river', south of Riyadh (MB26), was joined by a second bird in full plumage by 24 May. These two birds remained on or about the same pools until 7 June, but then disappeared. The number of summer plumaged terns of various species visiting for prolonged periods in recent years leads one to suspect an attempt at breeding might be made in the near future.

After apparently being absent, or unusually scarce, during winter and early spring, squacco herons *Ardeola ralloides* (ABBA No 108) gave us a surprise. On 24 May two birds with bright blue bills and orange-red legs were observed in dead tamarisk above the dam at al Hair. The following week there were at least eleven birds displaying and nest building in a group of dead tamarisk below the dam. Two nests were easily visible from the high banks of the wadi as was a purple heron *Ardea purpurea* sitting on its nest only 3-4 m from the squaccos. At this time there were at least 10 pairs and possibly up to 20 pairs of purple herons within a kilometre stretch of the river.

On 6 June there were five squacco nests and by 14 June seven nests, with birds sitting. The colony was watched intently and on 4 July seven nests were occupied, with nestlings in a further three.

By this time two pairs of night herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* (ABBA No 104) had appeared and were displaying and also nest building in the same trees as the squaccos. Equally interesting were a pair of cattle egrets *Bubulcus ibis* found 300 m down the wadi from the heronry which were also displaying and nest building! Alas they were not seen after this occasion.

On 12 July seven night herons nests were identifiable and probably more were out of sight. Annual leave interfered with further observations on my part during August, but David Middleton and Bill Sawyer continued the watch and noted eggs in two night heron nests on 9 August. By 12 September the heronry count was 13 adult and juvenile night herons, some juvenile purples, but no squaccos were to be found anywhere in the wadi.

These are the first proven breeding records for night and squacco herons in Arabia, the first central Arabian breeding of purple heron and the first central Arabian attempted breeding by cattle egret.

All the excitement however was not at al Hair. Ten kilometres further south on the river on 6 June a 'reed' warbler's nest was found on the edge of a phragmites bed. The nest was situated on the river side of the bed slung between two phragmites stems about 40 cm above the water that was about 25-30 cms deep. The initial differential diagnosis was reed or moustached warbler but no more than a brown micro-second glimpse was obtained of the adult bird. However by dint of the exceeding tightness and neatness of the nest, we deemed it to be reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. (The reed warbler has bred at Tabuk, *Phoenix* 6: 3, 7 & 8, Ed.) The nest with two eggs in it was photographed on 14 June. No more eggs were laid and the two young completely filled the nest on 4 July and by our visit on 12 July they had, as expected, flown.

During May and June 1991 it was estimated that the ambient temperatures were at least 5-7°C below the average. Throughout this period a northerly wind blew much of the time and many days were associated with a dark haze (oil and dust) emanating from the fires on the Kuwaiti oilfields. Did the lower temperatures persuade these usually migratory species to stay and breed? The habitat they chose has been quite unaltered for the last ten years apart from the introduction of fish, six or seven years ago. Night herons have however over-wintered in increasingly large numbers in the last three or four years (up to 170 counted last winter) so it might have been expected that one or two birds would eventually over-summer.

Next year? -We will see.

Dr Dai James, British Aerospace, PO Box 1732, Riyadh 11441, Saudi Arabia.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

New Forms 1 and 3

The "Instructions to contributors" form and the observers report form (Forms 1 and 3) have both been revised and reprinted. Copies of the new forms will go out with this issue of *Phoenix* to those known to be currently 'active' in Arabia. Anyone else who needs copies should write in. (The old report forms may still be used.).

The international boundaries between Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia

Bilateral agreements between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 1965 and Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in 1974 have set the international boundaries between these countries. The details of these agreements were not fully published until recently so readers might care to note where the boundaries lie, as the line is not quite as shown on the basic ABBA maps, including those used in this issue. The border line is defined in Fig. three. Thanks to Jim Mandaville for this information. The ABBA maps will be revised in due course.

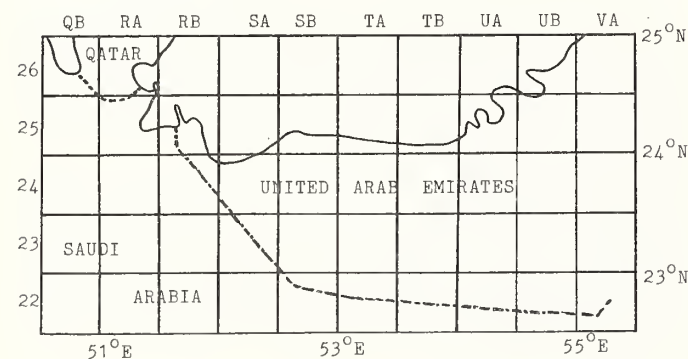


Fig 3. The agreed Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE borders.

THE ICBP/NCWCD SEABIRD MONITORING SURVEY OF OFFSHORE ISLANDS IN THE NORTHERN ARABIAN GULF, SAUDI ARABIA, MAY-JULY 1991. (REPORT ABSTRACT)

The National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) and the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) co-operated in developing a joint project to assess the extent of the damage to birds, caused by the massive oil spills that occurred in the Arabian Gulf during the recent Gulf conflict, and to gather more basic data on the little studied bird populations of the region. One aspect of this project was the monitoring of the internationally important tern populations that breed on the offshore islands in the Gulf. During the summer of 1991, seven Saudi Arabian islands were surveyed. Numbers of breeding terns were counted and an assessment of the damage, caused by oil pollution, was made. Other threatening factors to the tern populations were also identified and studied.

A total of 78,450 pairs of four different tern species was found breeding on Harqus (PB32), Karan (PB32), Kurayn (PB32), Jana (PB31), Jurayd (PB31) and Za'l (QA30). No breeding terns were found on the island Al Arabiyah (QA32), which is completely occupied by a coastguard station. In total, 3,200 pairs of swift terns *Sterna bergii velox*, 20,750 pairs of lesser crested terns *S. bengalensis torresii*, 10,200 pairs of white-cheeked terns *S. repressa* and 44,300 pairs of bridled terns *S. anaethetus antarctica* were counted. The numbers of lesser crested and bridled terns are of international importance.

Comparison with results of a census of breeding terns on the five northernmost islands, made by IUCN in 1986, showed that the total population of terns had increased by 39% during the last five years, but that the populations of the two most important species, lesser crested and white-cheeked terns, had decreased by respectively 22% and 28%. Bridled terns made a spectacular increase of 270%. 3,200 pairs of swift terns were found in 1991, while this species was entirely absent in 1986. More study will be necessary to follow up population trends and to understand the causes of these changes.

No major impact of oil pollution was found on adult birds and their eggs, but some chicks were found moderately to heavily oiled by the tar that covers the rocky parts of the beaches on Karan and Jana. The problem was a rather local one and was restricted to the chicks of certain colonies of white-cheeked and lesser crested terns. A method was developed to study the indirect impact of oil pollution that can occur in the longer term, through the food chain.

Although the tern populations escaped major impact of the recent oil spill, mainly because it happened well before the terns arrived on their breeding grounds, oil pollution stays a serious and permanent threat to the entire seabird population of the Arabian Gulf.

Several other threatening factors were identified. Many of these factors are related to increased human activities on and around the islands and to the disturbance that

ADDRESS

All correspondence for the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* and *Phoenix* should be sent to: Michael C. Jennings, Co-ordinator ABBA, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE17 3HW, UK. (Telephone 0487 841733).

comes with them. Egg collecting is still common on the islands. Increasing numbers of people using the islands for recreation causes more and more disturbance to the breeding birds. Indications were also found that the islands are used as targets in military manoeuvres. Predators, alien to the islands, have been introduced and form a potential danger to the terns. Cats were found to be very numerous on Al Arabiyah and it was estimated that one single cat on Jana killed more than 300 adult terns in a period of two months. Helicopters were recorded regularly flying low over the islands and even landing in the middle of tern colonies, causing major disturbance and destruction. Increasing traffic of giant cargo ships and oil tankers, close to the islands, form a real threat to breeding colonies on the low lying islands like Harqus, as high waves caused by their movement can flood the entire island and destroy the eggs in whole colonies. The uncontrolled increase of industrial fishing could severely reduce the food availability of terns. Landfilling occurs on a large scale along the Gulf coast, destroying the breeding grounds of the fish terns feed on.

All these threats make immediate action needed for the long term conservation of these tern populations of international importance. To counter impacts of direct human disturbance, caused by fishermen, recreational disturbance and helicopters, well oriented educational programmes must be initiated, as this disturbance is mostly the result of ignorance. To safeguard the breeding and feeding areas of the terns, a chain of protected areas should be immediately established in the Gulf, including the islands, as well as important coastal areas like mangroves, mudflats, algae flats, seagrass beds and coral reefs. This can be done by implementing the protected areas plan of the NCWCD in the Gulf.

Further research and monitoring of the breeding colonies is needed to understand population trends, to define the conservation needs of all seabird populations occurring in the Gulf, and to develop adequate management plans for the protected areas. Further study is also needed to investigate the long term impact of oil pollution. In this respect, the breeding terns can be used as indicators of the condition of the entire marine ecosystem of the Gulf.

P Symens, NCWCD, PO Box 61681, Riyadh 11575, Saudi Arabia.

THE GULF CONFLICT - A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The opportunity to warden the ringing station at Die Reit at the confluence of the River Elbe outside Hamburg was something I had looked forward to all year. Involvement in a major international conflict could not have been further from my mind when, late one evening in Autumn 1990, the telephone rang in my little hut in the phragmites and I was summoned back to barracks. So it was that deployment to the Gulf began and a month or so later I arrived at al Jubail in eastern Saudi Arabia, which we had difficulty locating on a world map.

The possibility of some interesting birding had not escaped me, and among the packed essentials I had managed to squeeze a few mist nets, rings and a telescope.

My observations at our initial location were poor and consisted mainly of white-cheeked bulbuls *Pycnonotus leucogenys* and the ubiquitous house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, I remember the excitement when a white wagtail *Motacilla alba* and some hirundines passed by going south. Nevertheless I kept my eyes peeled, and as one became more familiar with the surroundings and adequate maps were produced, the true importance of the area for avian species became apparent. A flock of 74 greater flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* overflying our campsite early one morning left me in no doubt as to the potential.

Military activity at this stage revolved around the port, and with the help of a tide chart kindly provided by the Egyptian harbour-master my off-duty hours took on a new perspective despite the limitations on movement. My species list began to increase rapidly.

The tidal flats at al Jubail supported a remarkable number of waders, and the pools surrounding the water treatment plants attracted a wide variety of duck, herons, grebes, gulls and up to 500 greater flamingos. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* were regularly recorded as were small groups of passerines flitting along the coastal defences as they come in off the sea or down the coastline.

Wheatears quickly became a nightmare, and despite hours of study I all but gave up on the females. Sand plovers, too, were difficult but did become easier when in groups. It transpired that we might remain in the area for weeks so I decided to try some ringing and searched for a suitable venue. A call to Peter Symens at the NCWCD in Riyadh cleared the use of my BTO rings, and with assistance from an Indian gardener I established net-rides in the tamarisk and phragmites adjacent to his nursery. This small site on the west side of the town was delightful and I returned to it several times over the following four months. The variety of birds recorded was amazing in little more than an acre of wetland, and had it not been for the prevailing strong winds the number of birds ringed would have been much greater. The horned vipers, which the gardeners presented repeatedly for my approval, were somewhat disconcerting!

In November the principal species were chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, tawny pipit *Anthus campestris*, stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*. It became clear when retrapped months later that many of these birds over-wintered at this site. Among the other species seen or trapped were robin *Erithacus rubecula*, song thrush *Turdus philomelos*, lesser whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, common snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, isabelline shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, red-throated pipit *Anthus cervinus* and white-breasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. The latter is a most vividly blue bird in flight, and the one I ringed remained at this site until at least March 1991.

In the water treatment pools to the north of al Jubail large concentrations of waders had gathered which included greater sand *Charadrius leschenaultii*, lesser sand *C. mongolus*, ringed *C. hiaticula*, Kentish *C. alexandrinus*, and grey plovers *Pluvialis squatarola*, terek *Xenus cinereus* and curlew sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, little stint *C. minuta*, dunlin *C. alpina*, sanderling *C. alba*, curlew *Numenius arquata*, whimbrel *N. phaeopus* and bar-tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*. The gull family was represented by slender-billed *Larus genei*, lesser black backed and the *taiymyrensis* variety of the herring gull *L. argentatus*. Towards the end of November great black-headed gulls *L. ichthyæetus* were increasingly noted. Occasional visits to the local sewage treatment plant produced redshank *Tringa totanus*, greenshank *T. nebularia* and green sandpiper *T. ochropus*.

It was around this time that I encountered three separate examples of illegal attempts to trap birds. A brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis* was lured towards what appeared to be an owl-skin and its leg snared as it landed on the prey. A group of four men attacked coot *Fulica atra* in a pool by chasing them simultaneously from different points around the pool towards the centre where the birds were encircled and strangled. The last disturbing example was of permanently sited crude mist-nets in the water treatment pools which were left unattended. I never saw them visited and it seemed that they had been abandoned long ago; dead waders were hanging in them at all times and I had no access to a small boat which would have been necessary to remove them.

A short article like this is not intended as a summary of all species seen but other interesting records from this area included little crane *Porzana parva*, black-necked grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, ruddy shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, black kite *Milvus migrans*, water rail *Rallus aquaticus*, white-tailed plover *Chettusia leucura*, little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, black-crowned finch lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*, cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* and squacco heron *Ardeola ralloides*.

After the move into the desert in November the number of birds seen declined and there were days when I saw no birds at all, especially during the rainy periods. Coming to terms with the larks was something else and many remained nameless until I had observed them over many days and learned to identify them correctly. Some I was familiar with from earlier visits to Cyprus, but others were very different and daily sightings progressively confirmed their own distinctive traits. At no time did I see any owls or sandgrouse. Cream-coloured coursers *Cursorius cursor* became quite common as we moved north-west, as did Temminck's horned lark *Eremophila bilopha*. In the Dibdibah area north of Hafar al Batin the hoopoe lark *Alaemon alaudipes*, which had been the principal lark species west of al Jubail, was replaced by the desert and bimaculated larks. The occasional samam-sicus redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* and black headed wagtail *Motacilla flava feldegg* sought refuge in our leaguer areas during bad weather. Dunn's, *Eremalauda dunni* bar-tailed desert *Ammomanes cinctura* and lesser short-

toed larks *Calandrella rufescens* found an unusually rich food source around our feeding areas as we entered southern Iraq in mid-February and moved eastwards towards Kuwait.

The ornithological highlight of the scramble through Iraq was a single black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus* which landed on a stationary vehicle during a heavy storm and the sudden, colourful appearance of many woodchat shrikes *Lanius senator*. Until this time very few raptors had been seen, but towards the middle of February the occasional steppe eagle *Aquila nipalensis* showed an interest in our activities and would spend up to an hour soaring above our vehicles. Migrating buzzards *Buteo* sp. were recorded in small groups as we entered Kuwait, and kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* made half-hearted attacks on the early swallows *Hirundo rustica*, which by this time were on their way north again.

After the conflict I spent ten days in Kuwait. The only bird I ringed there was a chiffchaff which took refuge in the cab of a vehicle! It was early March and the raptor movement was increasing in the form of a very pale short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, more buzzards and single marsh harriers *Circus aeruginosus*.

By mid-March we received orders to return to Germany and I made the return journey by road from Kuwait to al Jubail. Migration was obvious everywhere with good numbers of shrikes all along the coast road and flocks of larks, phylloscopus warblers and hirundines coming off the desert. Passing through the burning oilfields I saw many blackened gulls, but these seemed to be victims of the polluted air rather than the sea. They scavenged in the conflict debris and were flying between the clouds emanating from the burning well-heads. Droplets of oil from these clouds badly fouled the vehicle windscreens and I am sure will have coated the birds as well. Along the coast a few doomed cormorants and grebes were noted, but the worst affected birds I recorded were the waders. Although not entirely flightless many were badly soiled, and the pools at al Jubail told a similar story.

Two final visits to the nursery showed an influx of hoopoes *Upupa epops* and grey wagtails *Motacilla cinerea* plus a marsh sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Menetries *Sylvia mystacea* and great reed warblers *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*. There were significantly increased numbers of the species recorded previously at the site.

The circumstances of my five months in the Gulf are well known and require no explanation. I made use of my time and maintained a daily record of my observations where possible. All data were passed to the ABBA project on my return to Europe and will, I hope, make a useful contribution to the Atlas. My interest in ornithology was rewarded time and again, and I left the area more aware than ever of the vast number of species the Gulf area supports. A pragmatic conservation policy is paramount in order to secure and maintain for the future the unique characteristics of this internationally important yet essentially fragile, habitat.

Major A J Crease, The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards.

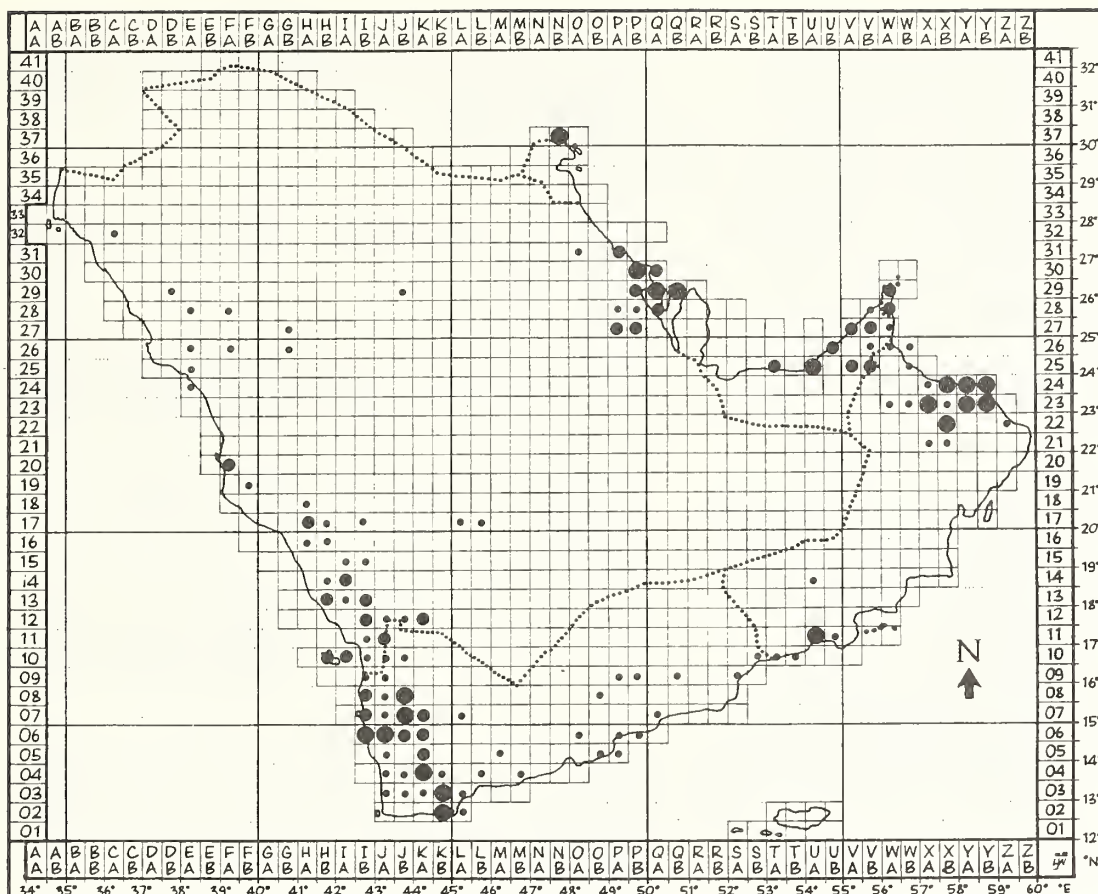


Fig 4
The distribution of a common resident species, but which one?
Answer over the page.

WHAT SPECIES IS THIS?

The current draft distribution map of a well known bird is depicted at Fig 4. Can you work out what it is. Or guess? (The map has not been published before.) The passerine species depicted has a wide distribution in the Gulf coastal lowlands (bred once recently in Kuwait). It is absent from central Oman and large parts of western Arabia. In central Arabia it is very local and there are two extremely isolated populations at JB29 and LA-LB17 separated by over 300 km from other parts of its range. It is a species that prefers dense vegetation, especially gardens, preferably slightly wet. Avoids arid 'desert' conditions. *Answer on the next page*

DOVES UPDATE

Earlier issues of *Phoenix* have drawn special attention to the recent dynamic range extension of some doves in Arabia, particularly the Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, the African collared dove *S. roseogrisea* and the palm dove *S. senegalensis*. The note in *Phoenix* 7 about the apparent lack of records of Eurasian collared dove from Qatar has brought the following information from Effie Warr. The species was first recorded in Qatar in August 1975 by R C Mansfield but the next was not seen until December 1981 by J and M Hutton. Since then the species has gradually built up in numbers and was widespread by 1986. In 1991 in south central Saudi Arabia at Qaryat al Faw (LA16) this dove was recorded one square further south than it was in 1987 (M C J). Its close relative the African collared dove was found in 1991 at several places further east in central Saudi Arabia than previously, including squares KA19 & KA15(M C J).

The second square being only 80 km west of the Eurasian collared dove record above. This means that in central Arabia the area of potential overlap of these two species now stretches some 900 km. In eastern Yemen Tony Salmon reports seeing African collared dove in QB08 and QA08 during April and May 1990, the nearest record yet to the Eurasian collared dove records of Dhofar province, Oman.

RECENT REPORTS

Some reports received are especially interesting on account of the species concerned, an unusual location or habitat, the period of breeding or the sheer number of birds involved. The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months, some relate to earlier years. Reports of unusual birds often get reported by more than one observer; although care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, it is regretted if the original finder of a rare bird is not properly identified.

Audubon's shearwater *Puffinus Iherminieri*

W R P Bourne found this species rather numerous at sea off southern Arabian in 1990 and 1991 and considers that it may nest widely on islands and sea cliffs from the Straits of Hormuz to the southern Red Sea.

Bald ibis *Geronticus eremita*

Up to seven were present in late April at Kulach (GB19) near the National Wildlife Research Centre, Taif, Saudi Arabia (J Asmode). None of these birds had rings on which indicates that they may be from a breeding locality outside of Birejik, Turkey whose wild population now appears to be extinct.

Little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Juveniles were seen in Dhofar, Oman (UA11) 6 August 1987. A new breeding area (Oman Central Record).

Reef heron *Egretta gularis*

Seventeen nests, some with young, were found in June 1990, on the Musandam Peninsula (WA28), Oman (Oman Central Record).

Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*

Thirty four roosting together on the ground in the Mahazat as Sayd reserve, central Saudi Arabia (IA21) in February 1991 (J Asmode). This is the largest number seen together in Arabia.

Black vulture *Aegypius monachus*

A single adult seen 30 April 1991 in central Saudi Arabia (JA23) (M C J). This late record is probably the best indication yet that this species breeds in central Saudi Arabia.

Short-toed eagle *Circus gallicus*

Display (BEC 05) was noted in northern Oman (WA28) 29 April 1988 (Oman Central Record). There is still no confirmed breeding records of this species for Arabia.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Sixty five pairs present near Tabuk, northern Saudi Arabia (CB33) in June 1990, (A J Stagg).

Water rail *Rallus arquaticus*

Persistent courtship calls at Janabiyah Bahrain (QA29) mid May 1991 and juveniles seen there mid July (E Hirschfeld). Also heard calling on several occasions during March and April 1991 at Ras al Gahr (PA31) eastern Saudi Arabia (P Symens).

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

Present throughout March to September 1990 at the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre, Thumamah, central Saudi Arabia (MB27). Probably attempted nesting in June (F E Rietkirk). Also present in Bahrain June 1991 in circumstances suggesting breeding may have been attempted, (E Hirschfeld).

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Bred successfully at fresh water lagoons near Jubail (PB30), April 1991 and at least one pair at same locality with eggs in July 1991 (P Symens).

Sooty tern *Sterna fuscata*

Six nests each with one egg, Musandam Peninsula (WB29) Oman, 24 June 1990 (Oman Central Record).

Saunders's little tern *Sterna saundersi*

Newly fledged, food begging juveniles, 28 June 1991 near Umm al Quwain UAE (VB28) (C Richardson). First breeding for northern Emirates.

Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

A juvenile being fed by an adult (BEC 12), Bahrain, 27 May 1990 (E Hirschfeld). No nests have been found of this species in Arabia.

Didric cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*

A juvenile, Dhofar, Oman (UA11), 21 September 1989 (Oman Central Record). First indication of breeding in southern Oman.

Eagle owl *Bubo bubo*

Nested in a *Prosopis cineraria* tree near Adjman (VB27), UAE, 1991. (C Richardson). The first tree nesting record for this species on ABBA files.

Nubian nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*

Two 1 May 1990, eastern Yemen (RA07), T Salmon.

Singing bushlark *Mirafra cantillans*

Food carrying, Dhofar, Oman (UA11) 24 May 1990 (I J A Brown). There are very few breeding records of this species from Arabia.

Graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*

A pair, with at least one juvenile northern Kuwait late April 1990 (W A Stuart). The first breeding record for Kuwait.

Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*

A record from Abu al Abyad island (TB25) 5 May 1990, (P Goriup) is the furthest west this species has been recorded in the UAE.

Nile valley sunbird *Anthreptes metallicus*

This species was observed in the Mahazat as Sayd reserve (IA21) in March 1991, apparently visiting the area to feed on *Muaera* blossoms (J Asmode). Other records suggest it moves around quite a bit outside its breeding season. An extralimital record of a single bird in JB23 in May 1991 (MCJ) was at least 350 km east of its nearest known breeding locality.

Isabelline shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Courtship observed Ras al Khaimah (VB28) UAE May 1991 (C Richardson). There are other records of this species singing in Arabia and future breeding seems a possibility.

Black-headed bushshrike *Schagra senegala*

Juveniles being fed by adults 7 April 1987 in Yemen (JB07) (N Redman). A rare indication of the breeding season of this species in Arabia. An extralimital record of this species (singing) was obtained near Ranyah (IB18) western Saudi Arabia in April 1991 (M C J).

House sparrow *Passer domesticus*

WRP Bourne reports that house sparrows came aboard a naval vessel on 10 March 1991 in the north Arabian Gulf and accompanied the vessel part of the way back to Bahrain. There have been other reports of house sparrows visiting ships e.g. from Jizan to the Farasan islands in the southern Red Sea. Further information of house sparrows, or any other birds, hitching rides on ships would be welcomed.

Answer to: "What species is this?" (see previous page).

Fig 4. shows the distribution of the graceful warbler *Prinia gracilis*.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

About 30 pairs, some accompanied by juveniles, near Tabuk northern Saudi Arabia (CA33), March to June 1990 (A J Stagg).

Desert finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

D James and D Middleton report small groups of this species near Riyadh in the winters of 1989/90 and 1990/91. In May 1991 a single bird was seen near al Hair (NA25) central Arabia (M C J). This date indicates that the species may now breed in central Arabia. The nearest locality to Riyadh where this species has been recorded is Tayma (EA32) about 1000 km to the north west.

Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica*

Bred Jubail (PB30), juveniles in July 1991 (P Symens). Flocks of up to 30, seen in Bahrain October 1990. (E Hirschfeld).

PROGRESS SO FAR

Brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis*

Project progress in this issue is measured not so much in terms of information gained but by the progress of the data capture exercise currently continuing; transferring manual records to the computer database. This programme has suffered unavoidable setbacks including software problems. The computer generated map of the brown-necked raven records captured so far is shown at Fig 5. Compared with the draft map for this species shown in *Phoenix* 7:13 only a small proportion of records appear, reflecting that at present only 6000 records have been captured. It should be noted that the numeric codes used on this map are **not** the ABBA Breeding Evidence

Code but a shortened version of it. The short key to the code is as follows, 0-2 indicates presence; 3 is possibly breeding; 4-6 probably breeding and 7-9 confirmed breeding. It is planned to prepare maps in this format for publication in the *Interim Atlas*.

CRAB PLOVERS *DROMAS ARDEOLA* BREEDING IN UAE

It is regretted that the excellent article by Maarten Verhage et al in *Phoenix* 7, which recorded the first documented breeding of crab plovers in the southern Arabian Gulf near Abu Dhabi and the accompanying photo, gave the impression that the colony had only just been established. In fact the colony is clearly of some antiquity and Bish Brown and Adrian Chapman have advised that local people knew of the colony over 20 years ago, when it was considerably bigger, and went there to collect eggs and chicks for food. Apologies to the authors for any over-zealous editing. (Ed).

RECORDS WANTED

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, who have not yet received the "Instructions to Contributors" and a set of report forms, are urged to make contact with the Co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, information on behaviour suggesting likely or possible breeding is just as valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

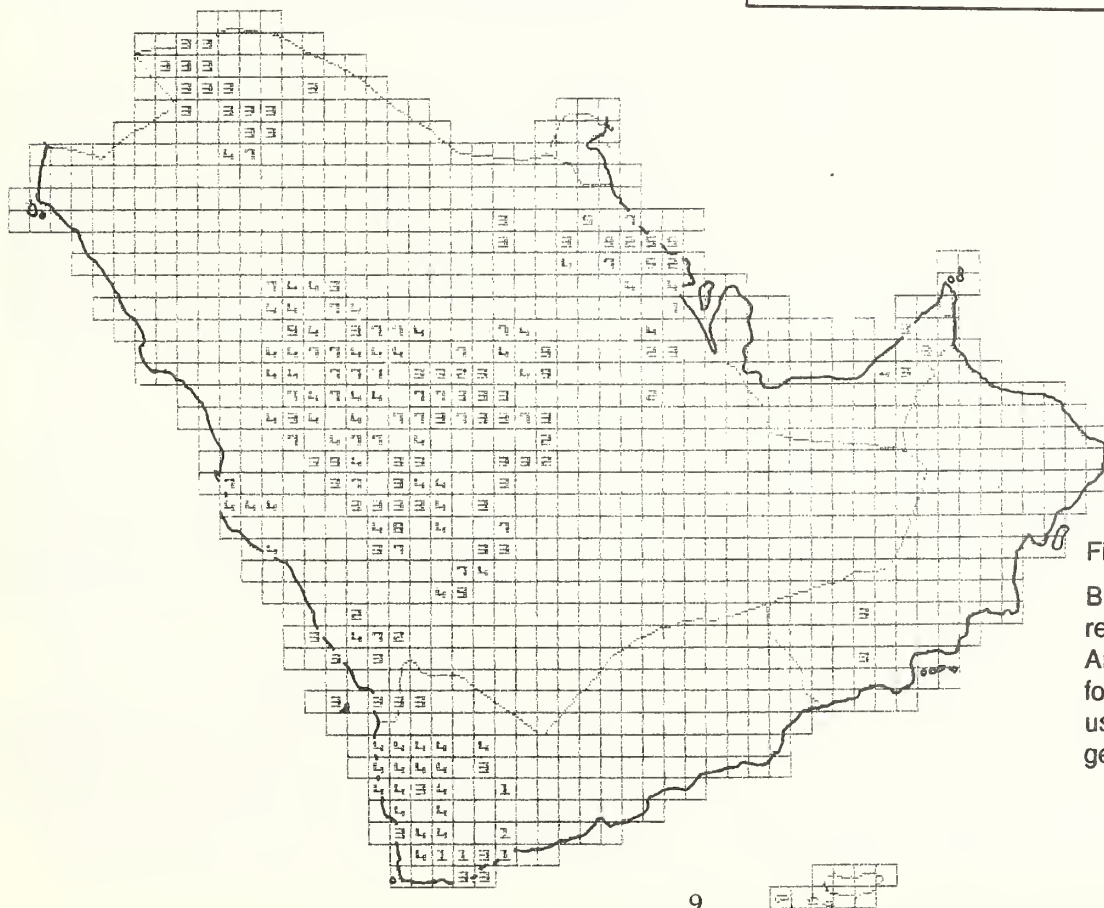


Fig 5.

Brown-necked raven records currently on the ABBA database. See text for explanation of code used on this computer generated map.

ARABIAN ENDEMICS FOR LUMPERS AND SPLITTERS

Endemic species are those only found within a specific geographical area. Endemics are of special interest and concern to all ornithologists as, on the one hand they are the essential first target for the twitcher to tick off on a visit to a new area and on the other they are always the key species for protection and conservation. There are a number of species endemic to the Arabian Peninsula but it sometimes seems a variable number, depending on the reference one consults or the viewpoint of individuals, 'lumpers' favouring placing closely related birds together and 'splitters' preferring to keep them as apart as different species.

Endemics tend to be non-migratory landbirds. This is certainly so in Arabia where the geography of the peninsula has allowed species to survive, or evolve, in a high degree of isolation from their nearest relatives in Africa or Eurasia. Arabian endemics are restricted, more or less, to the south west corner of the peninsula, especially the highlands of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen. See the map at Fig 6 for the distribution of endemic species in Arabia. Several endemics owe their isolation in Arabia to one or other of the northern ice ages. These are known as relict species because they were left behind on their temperate montane 'island' when the ice sheets retreated northwards, leaving the rest of Arabia arid and inhospitable to them.

Over the years various authors have listed Arabian endemics and have included, or excluded, species according to their own view of taxonomic relationships and geographical range. The complete list of the candidates for endemic status in Arabia might be as listed below. In the list those species marked "*" are those generally agreed today to be good endemic species, those marked "□" are questionable on grounds of their geographical range extending outside of Arabia and/or the existence of a very close, probably conspecific, relative. Those marked "☆" are clearly not endemics for the reasons stated.

Philby's partridge *Alectoris philbyi* *

Originally this species was lumped as a race of the chukar partridge *Alectoris graeca* but it is now universally regarded as a separate species. Limited to the highlands of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Arabian red-legged partridge *Alectoris melancephala* *

Always regarded as a distinct species, this partridge is the most wide ranging Arabian endemic, occurring from northern Oman, throughout most of southern Arabia, and in western Arabia to 26°N. In places it occurs at sea level but is generally a bird of the foothills to the highest mountains.

Arabian woodpecker *Dendrocopus doriae* *

An undisputed endemic restricted to south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Mainly found in the mountains and foothills but rarely almost to sea level.

Arabian accentor *Prunella fagani* □

Restricted to the mountains of Yemen. It has been regarded by some authors as a race of *Prunella atrogularis*

although most now generally view it as distinct. (It is treated as a separate species for ABBA purposes).

South Arabian wheatear *Oenanthe lugentoides* ☆

This distinct form has been regarded by several authors in recent years as a separate species and is separately designated for ABBA recording. However the case against species status for this bird was well stated by Alan Tye in *Phoenix* 7. It is a race of the mourning wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*, restricted to south west Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the extreme south of Oman. It occurs mainly in the mountains but occasionally almost to sea level.

Yemen thrush *Turdus menachensis* □

Occurs in the highlands of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen. It is clearly closely related to the olive thrush *Turdus olivaceus* of the highlands of north east Africa. More study is needed of the two species to establish whether the Yemen thrush is distinct. It is treated as a separate species for ABBA purposes.

Yemen warbler *Cercomela buryi* *

Although the taxonomic relationships of this species are uncertain it is clearly an endemic, restricted to the highlands and middle altitudes of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Arabian warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena* ☆

Sometimes listed with Arabian endemics, but is not, because it has populations on both sides of the Red Sea and to the north.

Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps* ☆

This bird is widespread in south western, central and eastern Arabia. It is a near endemic with probably 90% of the world population in the peninsula. It is also found outside of the Arabian Peninsula to about 32°N.

Arabian golden sparrow *Passer euchlorus* ☆

Restricted to the coastal lowlands of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen. There is also a small population in a restricted area on the African coast from Eritrea to Somalia, it therefore fails as an endemic on geographical grounds. The Arabian bird is now widely regarded as conspecific with the golden sparrow *Passer lutea* found throughout the Sahel region of Africa from the Atlantic coast to Sudan. The ranges of the two birds do not overlap.

Arabian waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba* □

Earlier authors regarded this waxbill as a race of the common waxbill *Estrilda astrild*, but nowadays it is generally regarded as forming a species group with that and other very similar African waxbills. (See Goodwin (1982), *Estrildid Finches of the World*). A bird of the coastal lowlands and middle altitudes of southwest Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Yemen linnet *Carduelis yemenensis* *

Very similar in many ways to the Eurasian linnet but sufficiently distinct to be awarded specific status by all recent authors. Restricted to the highlands of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Asir magpie *Pica asirensis* ☆

This bird has a very restricted range in the mountains of south west Saudi Arabia, inhabiting acacia and juniper areas. It has been suggested that this may be a separate species due to differences in plumage and call from Eurasian magpie *Pica pica*. Little work has been done on this birds taxonomic status but most authors (including Birkhead, 1991, *The Magpies*). regard it as a race of the northern bird.

Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* ☆

Found in the middle and higher altitudes of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen and also occasionally in the extreme southern part of Oman: it occurs on Socotra. It is also found in Somalia and therefore fails as an Arabian endemic on geographical grounds.

Arabian serin *Serinus rothschildi* *

Occurs in the highlands and middle altitudes of western and south west Saudi Arabia and Yeman. Has been regarded previously as a race of *Serinus atrogularis* of north east Africa but is now generally thought of as distinct.

Yemen serin *Serinus menachensis*. *

A highland bird of south west Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Closely related to several African serins but now generally treated as distinct.

The above list leaves us with seven landbird species that can generally be regarded as Arabian endemics and three probables.

Seabirds tend to be more dynamic in terms of their seasonal movements and breeding distribution than landbirds, often extending or contracting their range in response to habitat changes and food availability. The Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* is endemic to

the islands and seas around Arabia although it disperses to Iran and Somalia outside the breeding season. There are two other near endemics. The white eyed gull *Larus leucophthalmus* is endemic as a breeding bird to the Red Sea basin only wandering occasionally into the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean. The breeding range of the sooty gull *Larus hemprichi* occurs all around Arabia, except the northern Arabian Gulf, and extends southwards on the African coast to Kenya.

A number of additional species are endemic to the islands of Socotra and Abd al Kuri off the horn of Africa, a province of the Republic of Yemen. These mostly have affinities with African species but all are poorly studied with virtually no information being added to our knowledge of them during the period of the ABBA project.

A great deal of work still needs to be done on Arabian endemic birds. Not least to clarify the taxonomic status of the "probables". For many basic information on breeding and general biology is still very patchy. For several almost nothing is known. In not one of the endemics do we have a clear picture of the courtship , nest, nest site, numbers of eggs, incubation period and fledging success. In addition the food and habitat requirements of all are only sketchily known. The Arabian endemic birds must be protected and to do this effectively a great deal more information is required about them.

M C J

DISTRIBUTION OF ENDEMICS IN ARABIA

If all records of the ten species that are endemic, or probably endemic to Arabia, are plotted on a map, the result is as shown at Fig 6 . The number of endemics

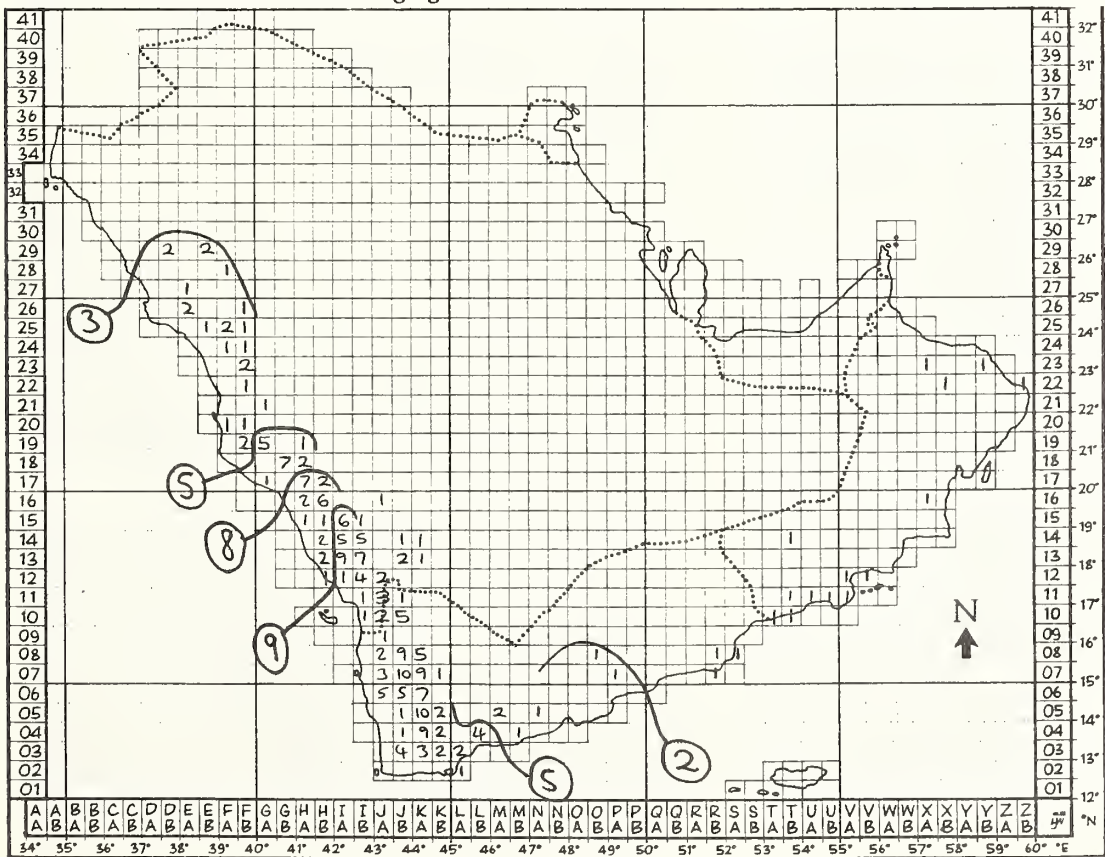


Fig 6. The distribution of Arabian endemic species taken from ABBA records received so far.

found so far in each square is shown. It is interesting to see how, with the exception of one species, the endemics are more or less confined to the mountainous backbone of western Arabia. The exception is the Arabian red-legged partridge which gets down to sea level in several places and is the only endemic that occurs in eastern Arabia. The number of endemics in each square drops off slowly moving north in the western highlands of Saudi Arabia, this probably reflects that highland areas are not continuous, are of lower altitude and aridity increases northwards. However the range of endemics abruptly drops off going east into Yemen no doubt because the mountains extend little beyond 46°E and aridity greatly increases from that longitude. The potential number of endemics that can occur in each square are as shown by the bold lines. All ten species have been found in two squares in Yemen, nine have been found in three other squares in Yemen and one square in Saudi Arabia.

SITES OF INTEREST

Atlas work is absorbing and rewarding. The common birds can be ticked off in each new square visited, the absence of expected birds becomes intriguing and a challenge and the presence of unexpected birds is always exciting. On subsequent visits to a familiar square, one can try to upgrade the previous BEC's obtained. Because of the surprises and many parts of Arabia are still unexplored ornithologically, all sites can be of interest to the atlaser. In this column the aim is to provide details of the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. This series of site reports is not meant to be a "where to watch birds in Arabia" or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although a good number of them are exceptionally good bird areas.

Observers are asked to write up sites known to them especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species that occur. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area or a whole mountain range.

Digdaga and Hamraniyah, United Arab Emirates (VB28)

It is perhaps not surprising that the area around Ras al Khaimah in the far north of the Emirates is proving of major ornithological importance. The tree-scattered gravel plains of Digdaga, Khatt and Hamraniyah (55°57'E, 25°36'N) are well-suited for agricultural use and avian life has been quick to follow. Government support has turned large tracts of the plain into fertile fields of hay, irrigated by a plentiful but finite supply of sub-surface water, pumped up from a network of wells. Water is used carefully and land managers take it in turns to irrigate. At any one time there are perhaps 1,000 hectares of grass under cultivation, regularly harvested and baled for animal fodder. Stands of ghaf trees *Prosopis cineraria* are still in place within the fields and this combination of habitat is rich in birdlife.

Resident Indian rollers *Coracias benghalensis* and little green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, thrive here and it is a treat to also find European bee-eater *M. apiaster* and blue-cheeked bee-eater *M. superciliosus* nesting in these

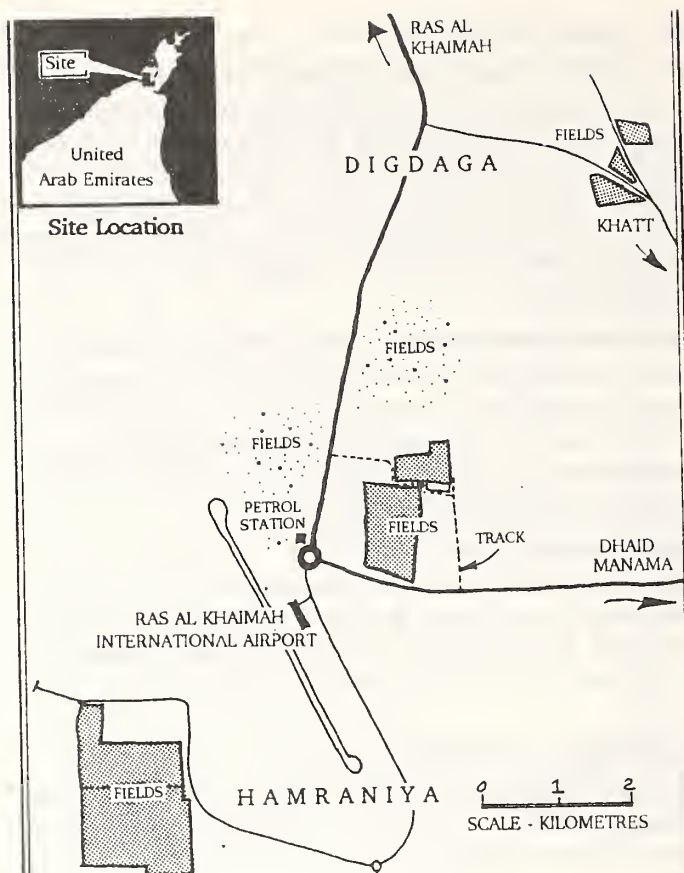


Fig7. Digdaga and Hamraniyah, UAE

ideal conditions (breeding first recorded in 1989 and 1990, respectively). They can be seen in variable numbers from late March to September. A little more surprising was evidence of breeding European roller *Coracias garrulus* in 1990, several juveniles were present in July and August, (*Pheonix* 7), and recently-fledged Spanish sparrows *Passer hispaniolensis* and European starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* were found in August 1991. Quails *Coturnix coturnix* were calling in the fields in March and April 1991, although the untimely harvest put paid to their breeding success. Namaqua dove *Oena capensis* has also occurred in spring and might be expected to colonise in the coming years.

The fields of stubble attract hundreds of common mynahs *A. ginginianus* and even rose-coloured starlings *Sturnus roseus* in autumn and winter. From May to August turtle dove *Streptopelia turtur*, a breeding visitor, joins the thousands of European collared doves *S. decacoto* perched on the telegraph wires which conveniently run the length of many fields. Two black drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus* were hawking insects from the wires at Digdaga in November 1990, only their second appearance in Arabia.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of these fields is their ability to draw in tired and hungry raptors on passage. Pallid harrier *Circus macrourus*, hen harrier *C. cyaneus* and Montagu's harrier *C. pygargus* find the habitat ideal, while an amazing selection of eagles has occurred, including short-toed *Circus gallicus*, spotted *Aquila clanga*, Bonelli's *Hieraaetus fasciatus*, booted *H. pennatus* and steppe eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. Other interesting raptors recorded include Long-legged *Buteo rufinus* and steppe buzzard *B. buteo vulpinus*, lanner falcon *Falco biarmicus* and lesser kestrel *Falco naumanni*. By late morning the sky can provide a super variety, even white

storks *Ciconia ciconia*, sometimes overwintering in these ideal conditions.

In spring the air is full of the calls of red-wattled lapwing *Hoplopterus indicus*, which is resident and nesting just outside the field boundaries, while the nearby Acacias come alive with yellow-throated sparrows *Petronia xanthocollis* and Arabian babblers *Turdoides squamiceps*. Rufous bush chats *Cercotrichas galactotes* nest in the denser growth, while hoopoes *Upupa epops* are abundant everywhere in the fields. The old *Prosopis* trees have ample nesting holes for most of these species.

Small pools form near the irrigation sprays, attracting migrant green sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, wood sandpiper *T. glareola* and common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. While the grass is still short, pipits such as Richard's *Anthus Novaeseelandiae*, tawny *A. campestris*, water *A. spinoletta* and meadow *A. pratensis* can occur. In winter black-crowned finch lark *Eremopterix nigriceps* and house bunting *Emberiza striolata* feed in small parties, and overhead, aerial opportunists like pale crag martins *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* and pallid swift *Apus pallidus* occur in their hundreds, joined by other martins and swallows. In spring and autumn, collared pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* and even white-winged black terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* have been recorded hawking over the fields.

The dusty tracks running between the meadows offer good chances to survey the whole area. The irrigation heads project above even the tallest grass and act as perches for rollers, bee-eaters, wheatears and shrikes. A good day could produce isabelline wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, northern wheatear *O. oenanthe*, pied wheatear *O. pleschanka* and desert wheatear *O. deserti*, red-backed shrike *Lanius collurio*, isabelline shrike *L. isabellinus*, woodchat shrike *L. senator* and lesser grey shrike *L. minor*, not to mention an occasional stonechat *Saxicola torquata* or black headed bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*.

The sites' potential is enormous and surprises are regular. A trip to Hamraniyah is well worth the two hour drive from Dubai for a good day's birding.

Colin Richardson, P.O.Box 2825, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

The Empty Quarter

The largest ornithological "site" in Arabia, the Empty Quarter (Rub al Khali) comprises a total area of more than half a million square kilometres, about the size of France. Most of this area is within Saudi Arabia but its borders include parts of the territory of Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Yemen. It is a contiguous area of sand dunes, subkhas and occasional gravel plains.

The core area of "the Sands", might be defined as the area that is enclosed by the road systems between Qatar and UAE, and in Saudi Arabia from Harad to Kharg, and from there to Sulayil and Sharawra, and the Oman/Yemen border. This core area is comprised of some four hundred thousand square kilometres of largely untouched desert, where trees of any size are an exception, there are no natural wetlands, very few rocky areas and only negligible human settlements. Ignoring the few bird species that only occur in artificial wetland areas the resident birds here are very few indeed. However there

is a much richer avifauna present during the twice-annual migrations and in winter. Most landbird migrants pass over Arabia, including the Empty Quarter, on a broad front, so theoretically at least, some two hundred different species could be seen there in the course of a year!

Breeding species are limited by the availability of food and suitable habitat and especially breeding sites. Those that have been known to breed in the core area of the Empty Quarter are very few indeed, reflecting the environment which has a very poor flora and invertebrate fauna. The most widespread and noticeable species is the brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis* which will nest on any object that places the nest more than a metre off the ground, giving some protection from ground predators. Nest sites include bushes, broken vehicles, oil well markers and even telephone boxes. However, probably the most common breeding bird is the hoopoe lark *Alaemon alaudipes* which occurs throughout the area. It is most likely to be nomadic but to what degree is not known. After listing these two species we have difficulty in finding a third widespread breeding bird. The bar-tailed desert lark *Ammomanes cincturus* and Dunn's lark *Eremalauda dunnii* both occur widely, especially in the northern and western edges of the sands and also on the southern edge in Oman but neither apparently occur on the eastern side. Indeed both are still absent from the UAE bird list.

Other species which occur regularly and widely but where breeding is probably limited by lack of suitable nesting sites include the long-legged buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, eagle owl *Bubo bubo*, and little owl *Athene noctua*. On the less arid edges of the zone, one can find lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*, Eurasian collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, palm dove *S. senegalensis*, Namaqua dove *Oena capensis*, black-crowned finch lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*, crested lark *Galerida cristata*, hooded wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*, great grey shrike *Lanius excubitor* and trumpeter finch *Bucanetes githagineus*. On the southern and eastern edges chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* are found and the golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* breeds in central Oman on the edge of the Empty Quarter where suitable nesting trees occur. The houbara bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* also breeds sparingly in central Oman and eastern Yemen.

At permanent human settlements within the Empty Quarter house sparrow *Passer domesticus* often occurs although they are certainly not widespread. In Spring 1987 they were not found, despite a search, in the sizeable town of Sharawra (NA12), a new city isolated by some two hundred kilometres from its nearest urban neighbours in Yemen and western Saudi Arabia.

There are a number of oases surrounding the Empty Quarter which are important for birds. In Saudi Arabia Yabrin (OB23) is an old date grove area now almost abandoned which holds house sparrow, collared dove, crested lark and spotted sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*. At Layla (Aflaq) (NB21) there are a number of natural lakes where crowned sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*, little green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygus* can be found. Further to the south at Sulayil (LB17) the graceful warbler occurs in a tiny

isolated pocket. In the UAE the Liwa oasis (caTB23) has the Indian silverbill *Euodice malabarica* possibly now its commonest resident bird, as well as numbers of palm dove, whilst at al Ain/Buraimi most of the above species occur. The only sizeable rock formations within the boundaries of the Empty Quarter as defined above, is the al Arid escarpment, the southern continuation of the Tuwaiq escarpment (see *Phoenix* 4:5). A number of species occur in al Arid that are not generally found elsewhere in the Empty Quarter, including the Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, barbary falcon *Falco peregrinoides*, sand partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*, rock dove *Columba livia*, desert lark *Ammomanes deserti*, pale crag martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*, hooded wheatear, white-crowned black wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, and trumpeter finch.

M C J

HOW TO OBTAIN PHOENIX

The *Phoenix* is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is also sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £15 (\$30) for the next five issues, ie Nos 9 to 13 inclusive. (Subscribers receive a reminder when their next subscription is due). *Phoenix* Nos 1 - 7 are available at £2. each (or the set for £10). Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years.

NEW BOOKS

The aim of this recent literature section is to give details of new books which are, in some way, relevant to the study of birds in Arabia or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned. Alternatively all the titles reviewed in this issue and earlier *Phoenix* issues may be ordered through Subbuteo books - see advertisement below. Whenever ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number shown. The prices given here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. In general, recommendations made about the worth of books are based on format, content and standard of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new titles not mentioned in this survey.

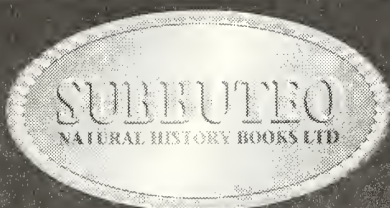
ARABIAN MAMMALS - A NATURAL HISTORY.

by Jonathan Kingdon, 1991

The Arabian peninsula, as we all know, is a large arid region which is isolated from the nearby land masses by desert and sea. Because of these factors it has a distinct and diverse fauna, often specially adapted for a desert existence. This book is about the range of mammal species occurring in the peninsula, which includes southern Jordan and the lower Tigris/Euphrates basin. The author excludes the Yemeni island of Socotra, possibly because so little has been done on the mammal fauna there. He recognises one hundred and five species in Arabia which are dealt with in the book. Ten are endemic. In the total there are 27 bats, 26 rodents, 21 carnivores and no less than 16 even-toed ungulates. The book is as much one of pictures as of words and in many ways is a very personal account, the emphasis being as much on natural history as on species account. The author discusses the influences contributing to the present day mammal fauna of Arabia, including the effect of the ice ages, which left a doormouse in the south west mountains and the intermittent land bridges bet-

ween Africa and India, which gave us respectively the hyrax and tahr. The effect of the terrain diversity in Arabia on the number and distribution of mammals is also discussed and conservation aspects receive much attention. The species accounts are divided into two parts. Firstly there is a description and notes on each species, illustrated by many of the author's sketches and then a pictorial section comprising well executed colour paintings accompanied by a short account, which is translated into Arabic. The main species accounts divide mammals by order, and then discuss them by family. The individual accounts cover description, taxonomy, behaviour, social interactions, food, breeding and life cycle. Some mammals are dealt with as a family rather than individually. Where appropriate measurements are given of length, tail, ear, hind foot, as well as details of dentition and weight. Each species account is accompanied by a map showing dots or shading, or both, representing occurrence in Arabia. The text has many surprises. There are details of two intriguing records of lesser kudu and information on two species that appear not to have been recorded previously in Arabian mammal works. These are the crested rat, possibly occurring near Hail in northern Saudi Arabia, and the royal fox which has been found once in recent years in southern Oman. Developing the historical sub-title of the book, species such as lion, cheetah, wild ass and wild ox are also given treatment, though the occurrence in Arabia of some of these is very questionable. Because the book covers southern Iraq some "wetland" species creep in which sit rather incongruously beside desert species. These include, among other things, wild pigs, swamp cat and otters. Domestic animals are not forgotten and include water buffalo, the Arab horse and the camel. The main text is supplemented by an inventory of species and sub species occurring in Arabia, an essay on national parks and nature reserves in Arabia, a bibliography and an index. There are 55 colour plates (paintings) and many line drawings. The book is written in a very readable, personal style and it is recommended for everyone who enjoys the Arabian environment or is interested in its mammals.

Hard back, 286 pages (213 x 282 mm). Price £59 (\$130). Published by Academic Press, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, Foots Cray High Street, Sidcup, Kent, DA14 5HP, UK. ISBN 0.12.408350.1.



We hold a wide selection of ornithological and natural history titles in stock and specialise in Middle east publications, examples of which are:-

"Flora of Eastern Saudi Arabia"

James P. Mandeville hbk £59.00

"Animal Re-Introductions - The Arabian Onyx in Oman"

Mark R. Stanley-Price hbk £17.50

"The Birds of Oman"

Michael Gallagher & Martin W. Woodcock hbk £37.50

"The Birds of the United Arab Emirates"

Colin Richardson pbk £15.00

Catalogue On Request

Subbuteo Natural History Books Ltd.
Dept. (CS), Treuddyn, Nr. Mold, Clwyd CH7 4LN
United Kingdom

Tel : (0352) 770581 Fax : (0352) 771590

ANIMAL RE-INTRODUCTIONS - THE ARABIAN ORYX IN OMAN BY Mark R Stanley-Price, 1989

Conservation stories tend to highlight desperate attempts to save wildlife and plants on the brink of extinction. This book is about one of the very few conservation stories that have a happy ending, the saving of the Arabian oryx has been a resounding success. This largest of Arabian antelopes had been reduced by hunting to probably only a few dozen specimens in the wild by 1962, all on the remote borders of eastern Yemen, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The Fauna Preservation Society (now Fauna and Flora Preservation Society) took a bold decision to make a last desperate attempt to catch a few animals for a captive breeding programme. They got four. Genetic diversity was increased by the acquisition of other beasts from zoological and private collections around the world. Even so the long climb back to the now substantial world herd, started with only nine animals. This book is about the story of the Arabian oryx from its near extinction to its re-introduction to the wild, in Oman. It is an enormously detailed yet readable book; it is one of a series of Cambridge Studies in Applied Ecology and Resource Management. Early chapters deal with the problems of animal re-introductions, followed by a study on the different oryx species, particularly the biology and history of the Arabian oryx. The book progresses through how a few were captured in the wild, the establishment of the world herd in arid lands zoos in the United States and its re-introduction in 1982 to the Jiddat al Harasis region of Oman, the last place where it was seen in the wild in the late 1960's. The progress of released animals is plotted in extraordinary detail, followed up with reports on breeding, movement, mortality, management and the continuing monitoring of the herds. Not a cheap project by any means; at times

over 40 people were employed, including local people from the Harasis tribe whose history and culture has been very closely interwoven with this romantic animal. It is a story of incredible patience and eventually great understanding of this animal's life requirements. The planning, care and professionalism which have gone into this conservation success story will be the benchmark and inspiration of many future re-introductions. Complete with an index and bibliography. The text has many graphs, maps and diagrams and there are ten colour plates of the Arabian oryx and its habitat.

Hard back, 291 pages (175 x 250 mm). Price £17.50 (\$34.50). Published by the Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK. ISBN 0521-344115.

FLORA OF EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA

by James P Mandaville, 1990

Of the many titles that have appeared recently on the plants and flowers of Arabia this is one of the few technical works, written primarily for botanists. That is not to say that amateur flower fanciers will not find a lot of interest in this book but, the author presupposes readers will have a basic knowledge of botanical terminology and field practice. The book is divided into two parts, introductory chapters of some 35 pages, and "the flora" of approximately 370 pages, plus various appendices and indexes totalling 80 or so pages. The introduction is wide ranging and complete. There is a detailed history of plant collecting and botany in eastern Arabia, an area defined by the author as comprising some 605,000 sq km (including 400,000 sq km in the Rub Al Khali). There is much geographical and topographical detail with essays on climatic issues including precipitation, temperature, humidity, evaporation, and winds. In addition the author investigates floristic regions, paleoenvironments, the development of the east Arabian flora and details present day plant communities. The systematic accounts are preceded by very thorough explanatory notes. This section is keyed throughout. There is a key to all the families and a reference number given to each family corresponds to the sequence in which the families are dealt with thereafter. Families are then keyed down to genera. Where appropriate within the main texts keys are given for individual species within each genus. There is a description of each taxa. At species level the author and synonym is provided, followed by an account of the form and growth of each plant, its size, a full description of its various parts, the habitat where it grows and its commonality. Localities of collection are listed and notes are appended on usage, edibility and Arabic vernacular names etc. The book is scattered with some 18 maps showing plant distribution in eastern Arabia, some of the maps dealing with two or three different species. The series of appendices at the end of the book are as thorough and helpful as the introductory chapters. Needless to say there is a extensive glossary of botanical terms, and a comprehensive gazetteer which also provides a short description of the localities cited in the book. 'Bibliographic notes' review briefly the more important published botanical works of the region and there is in addition a full bibliography. An Arabic index and glossary of vernacular plant names will be of

considerable help to Arabic speakers and botanically minded Arabists. An extremely useful index to both species and general subjects completes this complete work. It is illustrated by a few line drawings in the text and some 268 good quality colour photographs, which have been reproduced to a high standard. These photographs are grouped usually three or four to a page, but up to eight appear on some pages. According to the publishers notes this book is the first in a series on studies of the flora of Saudi Arabia and as such it sets a very high benchmark to be achieved by future titles in the series. A technical book which every botanist will need to have and an attractive one which most amateur Arabian flower enthusiasts will be unable to resist. Recommended.

Hardback, 492 pages (240 x 160mm) price £95. Published jointly by Kegan Paul International, PO Box 256, London, WC1B 3SW, England and the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, PO Box 61681, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. ISBN 0-7103-0371-8.

GRASSES OF SAUDI ARABIA

by **Shaukat A Chaudhary, 1989**

The National Agriculture & Water Research Centre of Saudi Arabia and its department, the National Herbarium, have in recent years published a number of extremely useful books on the natural resources of the Kingdom. For a country which has until recent years been almost completely a pastoral society and where rangeland still makes up 80% of the terrain, this latest title cataloging the grasses to be found throughout Saudi Arabia, is of great importance. The family *gramineae* has the greatest economic importance of all plants to man, being a major food source both for himself and his livestock and providing resources for shelter, bedding and many other economic uses. There are about ten thousand species of grasses worldwide in 651 genera, of which 280 species of 113 genera are to be found in Saudi Arabia. It is important that this study has appeared now at a time when there is great concern within the Kingdom about overgrazing and the degradation of once productive pastoral areas. The book starts with a synopsis of the sub-families, tribes, sub-tribes and genera occurring, giving details of the representatives in each taxon to be found worldwide and in Saudi Arabia. There are keys to genera within tribes and a key to the genera, comprising 40 pages in all. These keys are then subdivided to species level in the main text. Not unexpectedly descriptions and illustrations of all the species occurring comprise the majority of the text. There is a technical description of the genera and for each information is given of the numbers worldwide and in Saudi Arabia, with the Arabic and English names. (The Arabic names appear in Arabic script as well as an English transliteration). For each species there is information about its origin, the locality of the type specimen, taxonomy, nomenclature, distribution in Saudi Arabia and collection references. Notes are given on the cultivation of each where appropriate, its importance for browsing and grazing, or as a weed or other problems associated with it. Most species are illustrated by a line drawing, of which there are 207, showing all aspects of

growth, seed and parts. This is not a coffee table book, it is strictly a reference work for botanists and all shades of biologists interested in rangelands. Its depth and scope make it relevant to the whole of Arabia. Fully supported by a detailed glossary, indexes of common Arabic and English names and of scientific names, and a list of references. The introductory chapters and general keys are also translated into Arabic. Recommended.

Laminated card covers, 465 (plus 63 Arabic) pages, (235 x 165 mm). Price not known. Published by the National Herbarium, National Agriculture & Water Research Centre, Ministry of Agriculture & Water, PO Box 17285, Riyadh 11484, Saudi Arabia.

THE VEGETATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN (WESTERN PART)

by **P. Scholte, A W Al Khuleidi & J J Kessler, 1991**

Books on the natural resources of the Republic of Yemen are few and far between, so this new title is most welcome. Yemen has some of the oldest cities yet discovered by archeologists and excavations reveal a high human population over thousands of years. It is not surprising therefore that the environment of Yemen has suffered centuries of exploitation, through grazing, firewood collection and agriculture pressures. Especially in recent decades the traditional reserve areas and the age old values of desert folk have been encroached by commercialism and other demands to exploit natural resources. In many places the old ways have been abandoned altogether to a free-for-all. Vegetation is one of the few natural resources of Yemen, being a source of fodder for grazing, firewood for cooking and heating, and as one of the primary products of the economy. The Yemeni/Dutch Range and Livestock Management project at Damar has carried out studies, using extensive fieldwork as well as satellite imagery, over the period 1987 to 1991, of the vegetation of the whole of the western part of the Republic of Yemen. (This region equates to what was "North Yemen" before re-unification in May 1990). The book describes the vegetational units which make up western Yemen and provides practical information on the use and management of vegetation in each area. There are eight main vegetation landscapes described with various sub-divisions; from the Tihama coastal plains up to the high altitude mountains (which reach 3660 m.) and to the very arid eastern desert. Introductory sections deal with rainfall and other aspects of climate, habitat variety, animal husbandry (quantifying animal population levels by region), the flora generally (probably over 3000 species are to be found in the country), and the impact of man on vegetation. The authors come to the conclusion that western Yemen is not totally overgrazed by present day Arabian standards. They point out that all the major damage to the Yemen environment was done many years, often centuries, ago. They give good and bad examples (with photos) of vegetation management and degeneration. The good effects of traditional vegetation reserve areas (known as *Mahjur*) and local restrictions on tree cutting, are counter-balanced by the continuing search for firewood by much of the population, and the uprooting of trees and shrubs in the process of agricultural land clearance. For each of the vegetational units identified there is an account of the geography, geology

and climate, characteristic vegetation components and the use by man of vegetational resources within each. Recommendations for the management of each unit are discussed. Typical habitat photographs (with the plants identified) are presented for each unit. One major recommendation is to re-establish the juniper forest but not many of us will see this as it will be at least 50 years before any decent trees can be grown, even if widescale planting started tomorrow. There is a selected bibliography, index and a large fold out map of the western part of the Republic of Yemen, overprinted with the vegetational zones. This book is also available in an Arabic version.

Card covers, 56 pages (295 x 220 mm). Price unknown. Published by the Environmental Protection Council, PO Box 19719, Sanaa, Republic of Yemen.



Fig 8. Goldfinch, now numerous as a breeding bird near Tabuk in northern Saudi Arabia.

ARABIA SAND SEA AND SKY

by Michael McKinnon, 1990

This is the book of the film, or to be more precise of the three documentaries, first shown on BBC 2 in early 1991. It is an account of the diversity of Arabian wildlife, romantically and colourfully depicting beautiful deserts, juniper mountains and red sea coral reefs, following the general format of the TV series. Introductions deal with the climatic and geological factors that have shaped Arabia and given it its wildlife, and its proximity to Africa and India which have each donated elements of the fauna and flora. Some account is given of the prehistoric/extinct species of the peninsula with an overview of the extant forms, particularly those adapted to an arid desert environment. The main chapters of the book deal with the different habitats, sand deserts, mountains, Red Sea margins and the Arabian Gulf, each exhibiting representative plant, and vertebrate and invertebrate life occurring in each. A chapter is devoted to migration, primarily concerning birds, although insects such as locusts are also dealt with. Man's place in Arabia

from the stone age, ancient settlements and their economies, Islam and the bedouin way of life are covered. The effect of oil wealth on the face of Arabia and the changes it has brought about to wildlife and the environment are chronicled. Like every good TV documentary it finishes with a few words on conservation, drawing attention to the traditional *hima* reserve system, modern conservation and preservation efforts and the captive breeding and re-introduction of endangered species lost in the last three or four decades. The book has about 70 colour photographs, including many dramatic pictures of scenery, wildlife and marine life. These include a remarkable (remarkably lucky?) photograph of an Arabian leopard in natural habitat. There are suggestions for further reading, an index of scientific names and a general index.

Hard back, 224 pages (260 x 195 mm). Price £15 (plus £2.50 postage). Published by BBC Books, Woodlands, 80 Wood Lane, London, W12 0TT. Also available from McKinnon Films Ltd, 250, Royal College Street, London, NW1. ISBN 0-563-36106-9.

NEW ARABIC BOOKS

THE WORLD OF BIRDS IN EGYPT

by Mindy Baha el Din and Gamil Atta, 1990

This excellent little book is one in a series in Arabic, produced or in preparation, by the ICBP, for the Middle East area. It is aimed specifically at children. It has 96 colour plates (paintings by Robin Reckitt) of the common and interesting birds of Egypt and a similar number of line drawings by Sherif Baha el Din. It provides general information on Egyptian birds, their habitats, migration and conservation, and includes information on the birds of ancient Egypt as well as those of religious significance. Its aim is to encourage children in a straightforward and attractive way to take an active interest in birds and conservation. Much of the book is relevant, as a general introduction for children, to bird watching and birds throughout the Arab world and it is recommended.

Paperback, 44 pages (240 x 170mm). Price £5 (post free) from Mindy Baha el Din, ICBP, Executive Business Services, Cairo Marriott Hotel, Po Box 33, Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt. Published by ICBP in collaboration with the Egyptian Wildlife Service. Prepared with the help and sponsorship of BP Limited, Egypt.

JOURNALS, REPORTS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

New publication:

TRIBULUS: THE BULLETIN OF THE EMIRATES NATURAL HISTORY GROUP - Vol. 1, No. 1 (April 1991)

The Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi) has published a very worthwhile bulletin for many years, which had by November 1990 reached No. 42. That publication has now been superseded by *Tribulus* which has the sponsorship of a number of Gulf Companies and is printed at the UAE University Press. The bulletin is an entirely new format and design, being a very attractive A4 size booklet with card cover bearing a colour photo. It contains many black and white and colour photographs

as well as line drawings. The first issue of 37 pages contains articles on miocene fossils in Abu Dhabi, possible new bird species for the UAE, sand dune formations, archaeology at ad Door, dugongs, birds of Dalma island, and ticks. (The last paper is in Arabic). In addition there are various notes, announcements and recent reports. The attractive appearance of this entirely new publication, it is not just a revamped old style ENHG bulletin, will undoubtedly increase awareness and an interest in the environment, wildlife and flora of the UAE. The ENHG is to be congratulated on their first issue of this new publication. Further details about *Tribulus* and the Emirates Natural History Group may be obtained from the Secretary, ENHG, PO Box 2380, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

(Note: the ENHG (Al Ain) continues to function as a separate natural history group publishing its own monthly newsletter).

ZOOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST - Vol 4 (1990)

This issue contains 14 papers, two on mammals, four on birds and eight on invertebrates. Its geographical spread is from Bulgaria to Yemen and from Egypt to Iraq, and includes papers on the fauna of Cyprus and Saudi Arabia, although the main focus of attention is still Turkey, (five papers). It contains a particularly interesting article on the range of the Caspian tiger, which includes records from eastern Turkey and Iraq. Bird articles concern the black francolin in Cyprus, storm petrel in Turkey, and two papers on the whimbrel in Turkey and Bulgaria. Card covers, 120 pages (155 x 224 mm), cost 25 DM. Available from Max Kasperek Verlag, Bleichstrasse 1, 690 Heidelberg, Germany. ISBN 3-925064-06-0.

SANDGROUSE - Vol 12 & 13 (pt 1)

The latest issues of *Sandgrouse* contain 11 major papers and 8 short notes. Papers directly concerning Arabia are; locusts and birds in Saudi Arabia, the spotted thick-knee and stone curlew, additions to the Kuwait list, Arabian records of brown and grey-headed gulls (*Larus brunnicephalus* and *L. cirrocephalus*), Abdim's stork in Yemen, little owls in Kuwait and the Arabian bustard in Saudi Arabia. Short notes concern the first breeding of Verreaux's eagle in Saudi Arabia and an old specimen record of Shikra from Riyadh. Card covers, 56 & 55 pages respectively (146 x 210 mm). Available from the Sales Member, Ornithological Society of the Middle East, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, England. ISSN 0260-4736.

FAUNA OF SAUDI ARABIA - Vol. 11. (1990)

There are 17 papers in this issue, one general paper, 11 on insects, one each on molluscs, reptiles, and birds and three on mammals. The mammals papers include a very valuable check-list of the 98 land mammals of the Arabian Peninsula, providing a breakdown of the occurrence of each species by country. The paper on birds concerns reef herons on Bahrain, being a study of the numbers, colour morphs, habitat choices, seasonal activity and distribution over a 12 month period. Reef heron prefer open coastal habitat, especially tidal flats. Considerable seasonal fluctuation in numbers occurs suggesting that the bulk of the Bahrain population are birds on passage. The proportion of dark and white

morphs shows significant seasonal changes which is not adequately understood. Hard bound 381 pages (285 x 215mm) cost approximately 153 Swiss Francs. Available from Karger Libri, PO Box CH-4009, Basel, Switzerland. ISBN 3-7234-0010-8.

OMAN BIRD NEWS- Nos 9 and 10

Include notes on birds of Oman's border with UAE, reports from Bahrain May-September 1990 and Oct 90 - April 91, Buraimi birds, ringing returns, oriental skylark in Arabia, early days in Masirah Island and some statistics from the Oman Central Record. In addition Issue No. 10 includes an index to Nos 1 - 10.

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP;

GAZELLE - Vol 6 Nos 1-8

Contains notes on Siberian migrants in UAE, a birding mega-twitch (107 species) and the Emirates Bird Report No. 14, October-December 1990 (253 species).

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

Recent reports prepared include a census of the helmeted guineafowl *Numida meleagris* in Wadi Juwa, Saudi Arabia (pp 14), a seabird monitoring survey of the northern Arabian Gulf (pp 49) and the results of ABBA Survey No 8 to South Yemen (pp 64).

BWP NEWS

Many birders have grown up and come of age since the first issue of *Birds of the Western Palearctic* appeared in 1977. Volume 5 came out in 1988. Recent news is that we will all have to wait a while yet before the series is completed. Volume 6, which was originally to cover warblers to sunbirds, will now be split into two volumes. Warblers will have Vol 6 to themselves and Vol 7, will have flycatchers to shrikes. What would have been Vol 7 will now be Vol 8. The good news is that both Vols 6 and 7 are in press and scheduled to appear in Autumn 1992 and Spring 1993 respectively.



Fig 9. Over 44, 000 pairs of bridled terns were breeding on northern Arabian Gulf Islands in summer 1991.

See report page 4.

THE NCWCD VISITORS CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

The Visitors Center of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) Riyadh, Saudi Arabia was established primarily to make the public more aware of the dangers facing some of the Kingdom's wildlife and natural habitats. The Center, which is located within the Commission's headquarters compound, was officially opened in February 1990.

The Center is the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia and has many exhibits which illustrate the role, activities and achievements of the Commission in environmental protection and conservation of the Kingdom's natural heritage. The emphasis of the exhibits is on habitats rather than on animal species. One of the first sights to greet the visitor are murals painted on the front wall of the building which are replicas of rock carvings made by the people living in Arabia thousands of years ago. They reflect the importance those people attached to their environment and the animals around them.

Many exhibits are in the form of dioramas with indigenous animals and plants placed in habitats and landscape representing the variety of natural environments to be found in Saudi Arabia. As one enters the Center the first exhibit represents the vast desert of the Empty Quarter with its flagship animal, the Arabian oryx, *Oryx leucoryx*, shown among typical native plants of the region. The NCWCD is breeding the oryx at its two research centers for future reintroduction to this antelope's former range. So far a small herd has been released since February 1991 in semi-wild conditions at the large reserve area at Mahazat as Said, east of Taif.

Another diorama represents the loose reddish sands of the Great Nafud desert. A female and two young Reem or sand gazelle, *Gazella subgutturosa*, are depicted. This species is one of three gazelles living in the Kingdom which the Commission is studying and breeding in its research centers for eventual reintroduction.

The Ibex Reserve at Hawtat Bani Tamim one of eight protected areas which the NCWCD administers, is located about 200 km south west of Riyadh. A viable population of the Nubian ibex, *Capra ibex* is present at the reserve. An exhibit shows ibex and an Idmi or mountain gazelle, *Gazella gazella*, as well as a brown-necked raven, *Corvus ruficollis*, and a number of native plants.

Two other dioramas depict an ostrich, *Struthio camelus*, with four eggs and two chicks and the highlands environment of the south west featuring the Hamadryas baboon *Papio hamadryas*. The Arabian ostrich became extinct in about 1939; the Commission is now breeding ostriches for future reintroduction. The baboon is the most numerous large mammal in the western highlands and especially common in the protected area of the Raydah escarpment, located about 10 km north west of Abha. Man has helped create an over population of the baboon through garbage dumping near urban areas and by reducing the baboons natural predators through hunting and disturbing a balanced ecosystem. The NCWCD is closely studying baboon biology.

Whilst the displays generally underline the richness and variety of Arabian habitats one is a complete contrast as it shows how man can destroy and disturb the balance of

nature. Overgrazing and habitat destruction leave the fragile arid ecosystem with inedible, usually poisonous plants, dead animals, car tracks and trash.

Marine life is represented by two aquaria with animals and plants typical of the Red Sea, and two displays nearby showing the dugong, *Dugong dugon*, and two sharks, a blacktip reef shark *Carcharhinus melanopterus* and a sawfish shark *Pristis zijsron*. The dugong is one of the endangered Arabian marine mammals present in both the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea and is of special interest to the Commission. The aquaria reflect the uniqueness and beauty of coral reefs and are the only ones of their kind in the Kingdom. They are unique in that they are closed systems, there is no need for water change, little feeding is necessary and waste is decomposed biologically. Native highly coloured coral reef fish, corals, sea anemones, starfishes, sea urchins and other invertebrates are all living happily together in these aquaria.

Apart from the dioramas the Center also provides more traditional exhibits of the varied faunal elements of the Kingdom. There is an interesting collection of insects, a few examples of lizards and snakes, birds of prey and game birds as well as a number of mammals.

One corner of the Center is devoted to educating visitors about trade in rare and endangered animals. The Kingdom is a member of CITES and the Commission does all it can to discourage people from the consumption of and trading in endangered animals and their products.

The relationship between plants, animals and man with the environment is presented in a special exhibit entitled Pyramids of Life. photographs and graphics are used to communicate basic ecological principles. The interdependence of plants and animals, the food chains of carnivorous animals, the effect of overgrazing and habitat destruction on the vegetation cover and its indirect effect on the balance of the ecosystem are all represented. An example is shown of an unbalanced habitat demonstrating how this will effect the future of man himself. Finally there is an illustration of how man's wise use of natural resources will result in a balanced habitat, with all elements living in harmony with each other.

The Center has gained much in popularity during the past two years. In addition to the regular visitors, prearranged tours by groups of school children are conducted daily during the school year. It is expected that many more visitors will come to the Center in the coming year.

Iyad A Nader, NCWCD, PO Box 61681 Riyadh 11575, Saudi Arabia.

PHOTOS NEEDED FOR PHOENIX

Photos of habitats, Arabian breeding birds, nests and eggs etc are welcomed for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos may be colour or black and white (glossy or matt) slides, print or negatives so long as they have good contrast and a width of at least 12cm.



SOCIETY NEWS

UAE

The Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi) has, with the launch of its new bulletin *Tribulus* (see review above), dropped the "Abu Dhabi" from its name. Note however that the Emirates Natural History Group (Al Ain) still continues to function as a separate natural history group, publishing its own monthly newsletter. The Dubai Natural History Group also publishes its own newsletter, *The Gazelle*, as well as the Emirate Bird Report which covers all of the UAE states. The Dubai Natural History Group has a new address PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE. Recently there has been talk of a new Emirates Natural History Society to be based on the University of the UAE. Watch this space.

Bahrain Natural History Society

The new address of the Bahrain Natural History Society is PO Box 1858, Bahrain, Arabian Gulf.

Qatar Natural History Society/Group

For legal reasons the former QNHS now wishes to be known as the Qatar Natural History Group. Its address is still c/o Robert Nation, ICS Department, QGPC, PO Box 3212, Doha, Qatar.

The Society for Arabian Studies

The Society for Arabian Studies was founded in 1987, membership is open to all who are interested in the history and culture of Arabia. The Society publishes a newsletter which reports on developments in the fields of archaeology, history and all scientific studies concerning the Arabian Peninsula; including flora and fauna studies. In addition it organises a programme of lectures. The Society has charitable status and depends on subscriptions and donations. Membership is £7 yearly, details are available from the Secretary, c/o The British Academy, 20-21 Cornwall Terrace, London, NW1 4QP, England.

Fourteenth OSME AGM

The 1992 OSME Annual General Meeting Will be held on 11 July in the lecture theatre of the Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London UK.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHOENIX

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports etc are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. All submissions should be typed, double spaced, with wide margins. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

THE PHOENIX

This newsletter is covered by the Biosciences Information Service (BIOSIS) of the Zoological Record. Articles and information contained within *Phoenix* may be freely reproduced for scientific or non-profit making purposes, provided appropriate acknowledgement is given to authors, the ABBA project and its NCWCD sponsors.

FOR SALE: NCWCD TECHNICAL REPORTS OF ATLAS SURVEYS

To date, ten ABBA atlassing surveys have been completed. For each survey a summary report is produced which is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. In line with the ABBA policy of making all information collected by the project available to those who want to use it, these full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies. In addition a very small number are available for sale. Reports of Surveys Nos. 4 to 8, are currently available. These were to the Asir National Park, northern Saudi Arabia, Asir-Hedjaz Mountains, north west Saudi Arabia and South Yemen respectively. For details see the sales list accompanying this newsletter.



Fig 10. Spanish sparrows bred in three places in Saudi Arabia in 1991 and possibly also in the UAE.

CREDITS

Artwork for short-toed lark, bridled tern, spanish sparrow, Bill Morton; night heron, Hilary Welch; goldfinch photo, Arthur Stagg; Fig 7. Colin Richardson; maps M C J.

ADDRESS

All correspondence for the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia and Phoenix* should be sent to Michael C. Jennings, Co-ordinator ABBA, 1 Warners Farm, Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE17 3HW, UK.
(Telephone 0487 841733).